

Climate change blamed for allergies

Surge in respiratory diseases could lead to 250,000 additional deaths each year

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Climate change is not just hurting the environment – as it worsens, there has been a rise of between 300 and 500 per cent of city dwellers suffering from allergic diseases, according to local paediatricians.

Writing in the June issue of the *Hong Kong Medical Journal*, the doctors said the rapid increase could not be explained by genetics alone and highlighted “the important role of environmental changes”.

In their paper, the team of six doctors noted the World Health Organisation’s estimate that climate change would lead to 250,000 additional deaths per year by 2030 to 2050.

For Hong Kong, they added, it was estimated that “an increase by 1 degree Celsius in the mean daily temperature above 28.2 degrees” was associated with an increase in mortality by 1.8 per cent. The city’s average temperature has risen by 0.8 degree per decade since the 1980s.

The team of doctors from the Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital, Chinese University and University of Hong Kong gave several examples of the knock-on effects from rising temperatures.

For example, this had led to heavier rainfall and rising sea levels, giving rise to floods and exacerbating surface wear and tear of buildings.

This possibly induced more rapid growth of moulds in the indoor environment.

There was also a close relationship between dampness in the home and respiratory symptoms, including asthma, while dust mites and cockroaches that triggered diseases such as allergic rhinitis also preferred warm and humid environments, such as those found in subtropical Hong Kong.

Last year, the Hong Kong Institute of Allergy said more than one in two people in the city suffered from one or more allergic diseases. The doctors called on the government and individuals to choose low-carbon living to reduce environmental damage.

Meanwhile, on the mainland, sandstorms meant small particles could remain airborne for days and float hundreds of kilometres, “triggering asthma, pneumonia, allergic rhinitis, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases”.